

Izon language

Izon (Ịzọ̀n), also known as (Central–Western) Ijo, Ijaw, Izo and Uzo, is the dominant Ijaw language, spoken by a majority of the Ijaw people of Nigeria.

There are about thirty dialects, all mutually intelligible, of which the most important are Gbanran, Ekpetiama and Kolokuma. Kolokuma is the language of education.^[3]

In June 2013, the *Izon Fie* instructional book and audio CDs were launched at a ceremony attended by officials of the government of Bayelsa State.^[4]

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Izon	
Ịzọ̀n	
Native to	Nigeria
Region	Bayelsa, Delta, Ondo and Edo States
Native speakers	(1 million cited 1989) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ijoid<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ijaw<ul style="list-style-type: none">West–Central<ul style="list-style-type: none">Izon</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	ijc
Glottolog	izon1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/izon1238) ^[2]

General information and history

While there are approximately 1,700,000 speakers of all Ijo languages in Nigeria, it is believed that there are only a little over 1,000,000 Izon speakers. The language is currently classified as "at risk", with a 20% certainty based on the evidence available. Izon is recognized as having been present in the region several millennia before the 15th century when the Portuguese arrived at the Nigerian coast. At present, linguists approximate that the language became established in the Niger Delta region as many as seven to eight thousand years ago.

The Ijo people did not call the Niger Delta region home for all of history; in fact, it is known that there have been ancient movements from far-away places/from the edges of the Niger Delta. Because of this, Izon is closely related to a variety of other languages from surrounding areas, beyond the confines of Nigeria towards the sources of the Niger River near West Africa. Linguists have traced the pre-history of Izon far back and collectively refer to its roots as proto-ijo, the language from which all existing Ijo dialects came into existence.

Dialects

An Izon dialect classification from Blench (2019) is given as:^[5]

Izon

- West: Arogbo, Furupagha, W. Olodiana, Egbema, Gbaramatu, Ogulagha, Iduwini
- Central
 - North
 - Northeast: Gbanraɪn, Kolokuma, Ekpetiama
 - Northwest: Ikibiri, Ogboin, W. Tarakiri, Kabo, Kumbo, Mein, Tuomɔ, Sembiri, Operemɔ, Ọbọtẹbẹ, Ogbe Ijọ
 - South
 - Southwest: Apọɪ, Koluama, Basan, E. Olodiana
 - Southeast: Oiyakiri, Oporomɔ, Ẹumɔ

Preservation efforts

In recent efforts to prevent the Izon language from extinction, the Bayelsa State Government has taken great preservation measures. They have employed over thirty teachers to teach the Izon language in local schools within the state. The Commissioner for Culture and Ijaw National Affairs, Dr. Felix Tuodolo fears that because families are now teaching their children Pidgin-English, as opposed to Izon, that the language is now at critical risk for extinction. As a means of furthering the government's dedication to preserving the cultural language, a number of books have been written in Izon dialects to assist in this process

Syntax

- The Izon language does not make singular-plural distinctions in verbs, as opposed to what is done in English. Therefore, regardless of whether or not the subject is singular or plural, the same form of the verb is used. Such a system is evident in the following examples:

Izon sample sentence	English translation
Kiri ma se ke u sei mini ye.	He dances at all times.
Kiri ma se ke a sei mini ye.	She dances at all times.
Kiri ma se ke wo sei mini ye.	We dance at all times.
Kiri ma se ke oni sei mini ye.	They dance at all times.

In each of the four Izon sentences above, the same form of the verb "sei" (dance) is used, even when the plurality of the subject changes.

- Another interesting aspect of Izon Syntax is its Demonstrative Agreement. A variety of demonstratives are used in Izon to indicate the gender of the nouns that coincide with them. The demonstratives "bei" (this) and "u bei" (that) are used with singular-masculine nouns, for instance:

bei ki.mi. bei (this man) *bei owu bei* (this masquerade)

u bei ki.mi. bei (that man) *u bei owu bei* (that masquerade)

The demonstrative "ma" (this) and "u ma" (that) coincide with singular feminine nouns as follows:

ma iyo. ro. arau. ma (this woman) *u ma iyo. ro. arau. ma* (that woman)

ma ere ma (this wife) *u ma ere ma* (that wife)

In addition, "mi" (this) and "u mi" (that) are used with singular neuter nouns, for example:

mi ololo mi (this bottle) *u mi ololo mi* (that bottle)

mi bira mi (this hand) *u mi bira mi* (that hand)

When there is a plural noun present, the demonstrative "ma" (these) and "u ma" (those) are used, regardless of the gender of the noun. This can be seen in the following:

ma ere abu ma (these wives) *u ma ere abu ma* (those wives)

ma azuru ma (these rooms) *u ma azuru ma* (those rooms)

ma akimi ma (these men) *u ma akimi ma* (those men)

Additional linguistic information

Izon can be considered distinct from many other related languages in the region, in the sense that it follows a SOV (subject object verb format, both in simple and complex sentences. Additionally, directional and locative phrases also precede the main verb. Tense marking takes the form of a suffix on the final verb. Location markers and other preposition-like articles are suffixed to the nouns that they relate to. Possessor typically precedes possessed and adjectives precede the nouns they modify.

Sample vocabulary list

Izon Word	English Translation
abadí	ocean; sea
agbaì-àràù	girlfriend; (female) lover
báka	to be confused; confounded
dùlùkpùú	dirty (clothes, people)
fìkìmí	dead person; corpse
gbísì	cat
ingbekeé	unusually big
ìngìọ̀rìfí	to rejoice (in a festive mood)
kọ̀rọ̀ngbọ̀	thin; emaciated
músu	to become moist; be damp
peuu	describes a well-roofed house

See also

- [Eastern Apoi tribe](#) and [Western Apoi tribe](#)
- [Arogbo tribe](#)
- [Bassan tribe](#)
- [Boma tribe](#)
- [Egbema tribe](#)
- [Eketiama tribe](#)
- [Furupagha tribe](#)
- [Gbaran tribe](#)
- [Iduwini tribe](#)
- [Kabo tribe](#)
- [Kolokuma tribe](#)
- [Kumbo tribe](#)
- [Mein tribe](#)
- [Ogbe tribe](#)

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External links

- <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/7934>
- http://archive.phonetics.ucla.edu/Language/IJC/ijc_word-list_1984_04.html
- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7HL15LP5QbTN0IFNjI4bFFaWGM/view>

Further reading

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